Muncie as a Political/Economic Microcosm of Middle America: 1925 and Beyond

An Honors Project (HONRS 499)

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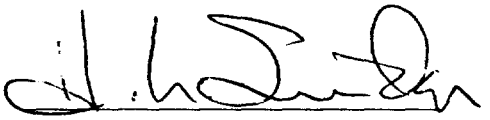

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Purpose of Project

This paper examines how Muncie, Ind., has been used by sociologists and journalists as a window on "Middle American" culture since the Lynds' initial *Middletown* study of the 1920s. In addition to the Lynds' work and its follow-up in the 1970s by sociologist Theodore Caplow and his associates, journalists' accounts of how national political trends have been reflected among Muncie residents will be reviewed.Continuing similarities in political attitudes and economic trends between Muncie and the United States as a whole will be explored in determining Muncie's usefulness as a microcosm of American society.

Introduction

During the winter of 1997-98, the Muncie, Indiana, area learned of the impending departure of two of its larger manufacturing employers. ABB, a manufacturer of electrical equipment, announced in December 1997 it would close its local power transformer plant that employed about 300 people in the following months. Less than two months later, General Motors Corporation's Delphi division told the media of its plans to consolidate its Muncie battery manufacturing operations at two plants elsewhere, removing about 400 jobs from the community. Only a year before these closings were announced, Borg Warner, a Chicago-based automotive supplier whose Muncie plant had long been the community's largest manufacturing employer, had begun the process of downsizing its local workforce by more than a third.

Even as this manufacturing exodus occurred, the unemployment rate for Muncie and the remainder of Delaware County remained fairly stable. According to the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, the annual unemployment average rate for the Muncie metropolitan area was 3.9 percent in 1997, and 4.1 percent in 1998, below the U.S. average for the time. Like measures for the state of Indiana and the United States as a whole, Muncie's rate of joblessness was at one of its lowest levels in decades.

Perhaps an explanation for this is a transition in the local economy that has been ongoing for several decades. While manufacturing industries employ significantly fewer local residents than they once did, service-oriented industries, such as those involving education, health care and retail trade, have seen periods of stability and growth. While the glass container manufacturing operations which produced some of Ball

Corporation's best-known products are long gone, two service-oriented institutions which the company's founding family helped endow, Ball State University and the adjacent Ball Memorial Hospital, have grown to become Muncie's largest employers. The economy of the United States as a whole in the latter half of the 20th century, too, has seen stronger employment growth for service industries than for goods-producing ones. In a time of an increasingly global economy in which many are predicting the United States' major role will be in high technology occupations and professional services rather than goods production, the Muncie area once again might, as it has on various occasions in the 20th century, provide a window to examine related social and economic trends at the microcosm level.

Middletown and Beyond

Muncie's reputation as an "average" American city developed in the years following the 1929 publication of Robert and Helen Lynd's sociological study titled *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture.* In the introduction to the 550-page report of their findings, the Lynds stated their examination of Muncie was to be an integrated look at the numerous facets that were "the life of a small American city," broader in scope than earlier "piecemeal" attempts at evaluating social problems. The husband and wife research team indicated they had no thesis they hoped to validate through the examination of their chosen locality, that instead they hoped to document observations of personal and community activities and therein discover possible new approaches to the study of group behavior (Lynd and Lynd 3).

The Lynds argued that virtually every action engaged in through the course of human existence could be classified in several primary categories of activities. These facets of "Middletown's" institutional existence, which would be the compartments shaping the whole of the research, included: 1) getting a living; 2) making a home; 3) training the young; 4) using leisure in various forms of play, art, etc.; 5) engaging in religious practices; and 6) engaging in community activities. While the validity of this classification scheme had not previously been established, Helen and Robert Lynd hypothesized the methodology as an expedient and objective one.

The city of Muncie was not identified as such in the Lynds' published study. The researchers opted to use the "Middletown" moniker instead, out of concern for the privacy of the community's inhabitants, they wrote. The community was not consulted in its selection as a subject area, nor were local funding sources utilized in the research (Lynd and Lynd 7). In selecting Muncie as the locale for examination, the Lynds found it satisfied two criteria important for the multi-faceted research they planned: being "as representative as possible of contemporary American life" and at the same time "compact and homogenous enough to be manageable in such a total-situation study (Lynd and Lynd 7)."

In determining the setting for their study, the Lynds further established criteria by which a city could be judged representative of the culture of the time: having a temperate climate; a growth rate sufficiently rapid to allow the examination of the "growing pains" wrought by the social change of the era; an industrial base utilizing up-to-date machine production methods; the presence of a diversity of industries; an active artistic life with primarily local involvement, as

opposed to a "college town" arrangement in which such cultural activities are imported by the college from elsewhere (what is now the third-largest university in Indiana with Muncie's primary venues for culture and entertainment on campus was then, as the Lynds described, a "weak normal school on the outskirts"); an absence of local conditions that departed from the norm of those encountered by American communities; and a Midwestern location (Lynd and Lynd 8). The sociologists cited John Dewey's observation in a *New Republic* article that this region of America would provide a stable middle ground among the varying belief systems of a heterogeneous U.S. population (Lynd and Lynd 8).

The rapid industrialization which the Muncie area experienced between the mid-1880s and the beginning of the Lynds' research efforts some 35 years later helped make it desirable under the Lynds' selection criteria. The community which had previously been a quiet agricultural center of 6,000 people saw its pace of progression toward an industrialized economy quicken with the discovery of natural gas deposits, which would prove valuable as a fuel for glass manufacturing (Lynd and Lynd 13-15). Automotive parts and metalworking would soon become predominant industries in the city as well. Accompanying the spread of industry was substantial population growth, with 35,000 people inhabiting Muncie by 1920, placing it in the medium-sized category which the Lynds felt would contain a viable civic culture but at the same time provide a compactness which would allow for reasonable easy study. The city's being self-contained (the nearest major city, Indianapolis, was two hours away by train and not yet reachable by paved road) and having vitality in its artistic and community groups also seemed advantageous

(Lynd and Lynd 9). Even with these steps taken to ensure the city was well within the mainstream of American ways of life, the Lynds stopped short of calling Muncie "typical" and urged those who might consider using the city as a representative population for future research to do so with care (9).

The Lynds' selection of a city as culturally homogenous as Muncie would later raise some questions as to whether their work showed a representative demonstration of American, or even urban Midwestern, life. In many other industrializing cities of the region, ethnic whites had a significant presence in providing labor for manufacturing operations. The Muncie working class' predominantly old-stock white makeup, drawn from the local agricultural background, thus presented something of an anomaly (Jenkins 303). In constructing their research, the Lynds and several assistants employed a variety of methods to collect data about "Middletown." The Lynds spent much of 1924 and 1925 living in Muncie as they conducted the research. The researchers observed interactions at community events, examined newspapers, diaries and other local sources of documentation in their efforts to assess the community in its preindustrial existence, compiled statistics on economic, religious and community activities from local and state sources, interviewed a sampling of families from varying economic backgrounds and distributed and analyzed a series of questionnaires (Lynd and Lynd 508-509).

The Lynds' assessment of Muncie's early decades of industrialization depict challenges for local residents that seem similar to those experienced throughout the United States in such a period of industrial development. Well-defined lifestyle distinctions between the

working class and Muncie's business and professional elite were described in *Middletown*. While members of the "business class," which the Lynds estimated made up about 30 percent of Muncie's population during the 1920s, saw their income-earning potential increase through adulthood, working-class Munsonians commonly faced economic insecurity in their later years as their physical capabilities were depleted in the face of demanding manual labor. "Well, he's been doing the same thing over and over for fifteen years, hoping he'd get ahead, and he's never had a chance; so I don't suppose he ever will," the wife of a 38-year-old machinist told the Lynds of her husband's outlook. Monotony associated with the repetitious nature of assembly work, along with the possibility of cyclical unemployment, pervaded the outlook of many industrial workers in "Middletown." As one factory executive who handled personnel matters said of machine operators in his workplace, "They're just working. They don't know what for. They're just in a rut and keep on in it, doing the same monotonous work every day, and wondering when a slump will come and they will be laid off (Lynd and Lynd 75)."

The Lynds wrote of distinctions between the family life existing before Middletown's industrialization and that afterward. Increased time in school, the decline in an individual family's living space, and other factors increasingly competed with the parents' role as agents of socialization. Education and leisure activities kept more and more children away from home for greater periods of time, and teens' increased amount of time spent on new options for leisure, such as cars and motion pictures, was a source of some concern for parents who spent many more evenings in their own youth at home.

In developing a conclusion to their findings, the Lynds described how some 19th century ways persisted alongside new cultural developments that had accompanied industrialization. The activities associated with earning a living had, in the researchers' assessment, changed most profoundly between 1890 and 1925, with the changes in leisure activities seeing almost as extensive a magnitude of change. The education of youth, community activities and home life had, in no well-defined order, seen the next clearest transformations from the prior century. Religious observations were the facet of life that demonstrated to the Lynds the most continuity from their 19th century characteristics. The Lynds noted that Middletown residents tended to find in older institutions a reassuring sense of stability in the course of change. Established ways were commonly applied in an attempt to solve new problems. For example, an increase in crime might prompt a call for stricter adherence to old codes or a doubling up of established penalties for violations; or findings of political corruption might evoke calls for better education about the Constitution or heightened get-out-the-vote efforts. Rather than increasing the quantity of such traditional institutional responses to problems, the Lynds suggested a careful reevaluation of the institutions themselves.

Six years after publication of the initial *Middletown* report, the Lynds compiled a sequel. In *Middletown in Transition*, the Lynds did not observe much further striking change toward modernity in the institutional life of their subject area (Jensen 303). Expecting that the stresses created by the Great Depression might have shaped skepticism among the city's blue-collar workers of the viability of modernization and "progress" that had guided industrialization and heightened working

class solidarity, the Lynds instead discovered only a modest decline in faith about education's ability to shape a better life and, among the business class, tinges of the fascism that had reared its head elsewhere during the international economic downturn (Jensen 303). The Lynds reported "Middletown's" residents expressed faith in values such as honesty, kindness, friendliness, and neighborliness (Kernan B1). But at the same time, many respondents reported sentiments that in retrospect seem to demonstrate an intolerant inconsistency with the above , such as a belief in the superiority of the white race and scorn toward people who spent leisure time in solitary pursuits. "For the problem of Middletown was fear: fear of strangers, fear of change, fear of the future, fear of the power of one's own feelings. Like the residents of Shangri-La, Middletowners seem to have been convinced that if they ever left their magic garden they would shrivel to dust," Michael Kernan wrote (B1).

Fifty years after the initial *Middletown*'s publication, researchers again took up residence in Muncie, which had since doubled in population, to assess social change since the Lynds' assessment. Led by the University of Virginia's Theodore Caplow, the group of sociologists chose a cross-section of the community to complete some of the same questionnaires Robert and Helen Lynd had utilized.

"The Lynds described a small city whose residents were straining to match the 20th century's industrial quickstep, but who clung to a 19th century faith in the value of work, church ,family and country. Today, behind the neon haze of new shopping malls and fast food restaurants, through the blare of discotheque music, residents of Muncie sometimes wonder what the last 50 years have wrought," stated a 1979 Associated Press story (B12).

Despite technological advances and new cultural influences arriving by visual media, the most basic values, including a traditional work ethic and appreciation of family togetherness, continued to thrive.

"If the researchers in the new study expected, as the Lynds did in the 1930s, to find a community radically altered in every respect, they had some surprises coming to them, too," Iver Peterson wrote in *The New York Times* (4:20). "The winds of enormous political and social forces -- World War II, the explosion in educational opportunities, the civil rights, anti-war and women's movements -- swept across America between the new and old studies, and left indelible marks on community life. Despite these social and political upheavals -- and despite such updated sociological techniques as chi squares, gini ratios and decile-slopes to aid in the study of what man thinks and does -- the researchers found important continuities in Middletown's outlooks and habits."

Among the researchers' findings was, contrary to the expectations of many of their colleagues, a somewhat stronger value placed on the institutions of religion and family, the demise of which many Muncie residents in the Lynds' time predicted in the face of competing influences wrought by modernization (Herber 11).

In *Middletown Families*, a book detailing some of the findings from the 1979 research, Caplow and other researchers stated that the myth of impending family disintegration in the United States had begun about the same time as the Lynds' research in the '20s, and "flourished mightily ever since and now seems nearly as indestructible as the American family itself (Herber 11)"

The researchers found in the Middletown III study what appeared to be a strengthening of the family's institutional form and increased satisfaction for family members. "We have noted the likelihood for the entire country is similar," a summary of the observations in *Middletown Families* stated (Herber 11).

Among the other findings of Caplow and his associates was a considerable lessening of distinctions between the business and working classes. Higher education as a means to social mobility had become more of a reality for the children of blue-collar workers, just as it continued to be for the offspring of the business and professional elite (Herber 11). A gap in labor-force participation by married women between the business and working classes also narrowed during the five decades since the Lynds' first Muncie visit, though financial need still did not influence the decision of women from white-collar families to work nearly as often as it did for their blue-collar counterparts (Associated Press B12).

The pervasiveness of television and other communication media, along with greater freedom to travel, Caplow theorized, helped make Muncie a far more tolerant place in 1979 than in 1929. "Today the individual has more slack in every sense than his 1924 counterpart," Caplow said. "He can loaf on the job, live with a mistress and I doubt anyone would notice. There's a sense that nothing's way far out anymore," he told The Associated Press (B12).

At the same time religious participation increased, greater tolerance for the religious beliefs of others appeared among Middletown residents. A sampling of high school students in the Lynds' initial survey revealed that about 90 percent considered Christianity "the one true religion," to which "all peoples should be converted." By the time of

Middletown III, only 38 percent of high schoolers surveyed held that belief (Peterson 20).

Another examination of Muncie as a reflection of Middle America took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a documentary miniseries was assembled. Peter Davis, who had been a news producer for CBS and an independent documentarian, collaborated with three Ball State professors in conceptualizing the six-part "Middletown" program (O'Connor 27). Funded in large part by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the films aired on PBS in the spring of 1982. (Unger 19).

Each installment of the series was intended to explore one of the six components of cultural life into which the Lynds had segmented their research five decades earlier. For example, "The Campaign," an installment focusing on the 1979 Muncie mayoral race between Democratic incumbent Jim Carey and Republican challenger Alan Wilson provided an examination of community activities. In "The Big Game," leisure activities were explored. High school basketball players and spectators were examined in the days leading up to a game between Muncie Central and Anderson high schools.

Some media observers saw in series episodes a convincing representation of life in Middle America. *Washington Post* writer Tom Shales, for example, recognized such in "Family Business," an installment examining the challenges faced by local resident Howie Snider, his wife Judy and eight children as they worked to earn a living at their pizza business. Noting the Sniders' demonstration of long-appreciated values such as family solidarity, love and sacrifice, Shales wrote of universalities linking the film's subjects to all family life. "(The Sniders are) the people that cynics in government and journalism

and entertainment and big business forget are out there," Shales observed. "They're the real America that really does exist (1)."

The documentary series, with its unnarrated, "cinema verite" approach, drew some criticism from observers who questioned its validity as a representation of community culture. Arthur Unger of *The Christian Science Monitor* called the filmmakers' style phony. "I say phony because it is obvious the subjects knew they were being photographed and often put on self-conscious 'shows' for the camera," Unger wrote. "The obvious intrusiveness of the camera as well as the light-and-sound persons in some instances, turned the series into a group of portraits of Muncie exhibitionists ... (19)."

John J. O'Connor, an arts and entertainment writer for *The New York Times*, argued that the film did not provide the thorough cultural analysis the incorporation of the Lynds' moniker seemed to imply. "After all, in using the established title of "Middletown," the series implies that it will be imparting broad sociological insights on a par with those contributed by the Lynds," O'Connor wrote. "By focusing on individuals rather than wider categories of activity, by opting for the dramatic close-up instead of the more broadly informative long shot, television's 'Middletown' raises more questions than it answers (27)."

O'Connor cited the documentary series' most controversial segment, "Seventeen" as an example of the weakness of focusing sharply on a few individuals in conveying broad insights about a community. He described the film's primary focus on a female Southside High School student who was shown using marijuana and whose speech was often marked by profanity. "How accurately does this girl reflect the students

of Muncie?" O'Connor wrote of the film exploring what the Lynds termed the "training of the young (27)."

Davis and others who produced the film series indicated that the documentaries were not approached as an effort to showcase typicality. "We never set out to find the most 'typical' individual or the most typical situation; we attempted to find people who were freely expressive about their lives and their concerns, and whose energy, conveyed on film, could engage the emotions and concerns of others," one researcher told *The New York Times* (O'Connor 27).

A Window on Political Trends

Since Caplow's 1979 revisitation of the Lynds' sociological research, Muncie has continued to be seen as a useful microcosm for assessing trends in American social and political life, though more recent examinations have not been so multi-faceted or empirically-designed as the "Middletown" studies. Rather, national media have occasionally focused on East Central Indiana city during election seasons, seeking local voters' takes on the social and economic issues tending to define campaigns.

"There is something ineffably average about Muncie, Indiana," stated British news magazine *The Economist* in a Nov. 2, 1996, article. "This very middleness makes Muncie politically fascinating. It is the quintessential home of the swing voter. And because it has been flexible in changing sides, it has gone for every winning president bar Kennedy in the past 60 years."

Table 1: Comparison of Presidential Election Results in Muncie and United States as a Whole, 1936-1992

Year	*Candidates*	*% of popular vote in Muncie*	*% of popular vote in entire U.S.*
1936	Roosevelt (D)	57	62
	Landon (R)	42	36
1940	Roosevelt (D)	54	55
	Wilkie (R)	46	45
1944	Roosevelt (D)	52	54
	Dewey (R)	47	46
1948	Truman (D)	51	50
	Dewey (R)	47	45
1952	Stevenson (D)	43	44
	Eisenhower (R)	56	55
1956	Stevenson (D)	46	42
	Eisenhower (R)	54	58
1960	Kennedy (D)	46	51
	Nixon (R)	54	49
1964	Johnson (D)	59	61
	Goldwater (R)	40	38
1968	Humphrey (D)	46	43
	Nixon (R)	45	42
1972	McGovern (D)	35	37
	Nixon (R)	65	63
1976	Carter (D)	53	52
	Ford (R)	47	48

Year	Candidates	% of popular vote in Muncie	% of popular vote in entire U.S.
1980	Carter (D)	37	42
	Reagan (R)	51	51
1984	Mondale (D)	43	41
	Reagan (R)	57	59
1988	Dukakis (D)	41	46
	Bush (R)	59	54
1992	Clinton (D)	44	43
	Bush (R)	37	37

Source: "Politics in the Heartland: The Lawnmower Vote," *The Economist* 2 November 1996, p. 29.

Caplow and his associates observed in their research during the late 1970s that the general optimism for the future which had marked Muncie during the Lynds' visit faded considerably in the five decades between (Peterson 4:20).

When *USA Today* reporter Debbie Howlett visited Muncie in the fall of 1990, uncertainty for Middle America's future again pervaded the observations of local residents at a time when the United States was entering an economic recession.

"An anger seems to be welling up across the land," Howlett wrote (1A). "Gas prices rise to new highs. the stock market falls. Crime is rampant. As many as 200,000 troops stand ready in the desert of Saudi Arabia. The same Congress that last year managed to agree on a fat pay

raise now struggles to agree on a fat pay raise now struggles to agree on a budget and keep the government open.

"In Muncie -- long regarded as a window on Middle America -- the outrage at all of this is as palpable as the chilly wind that blows the streets clean of fallen leaves."

Ray Scheele, chairman of Ball State University's political science department, told Howlett Muncie residents' growing frustration with Washington was indicative of sentiments across the country.

"I'm a big defender of Congress and I'm a great defender of James Madison," Scheele said (Howlett 1A). "He designed the government with so many checks and balances it should be frustrating to govern. But people just see a big deadlock."

Two years later, America's economic concerns seemed to have been galvanized in the wake of the recession, with President George Bush's domestic leadership ability under increasing scrutiny. As then-Vice President Dan Quayle tried to make "family values" a central issue of the 1992 presidential campaign, he weathered the taunts of what he termed the "cultural elite." As major newspapers honed in on Muncie's status as what Ball State history professor Bruce Geelhoed termed a "mirror of America (French F1)," the residents of Muncie, 50 miles south of Quayle's boyhood home in Huntington, seemed to focus their concerns on other issues as well.

"George Bush might want to update his resume and start scanning the help-wanted ads, judging by what folks are saying here in Middletown, U.S.A.," Ron Grossman wrote in the *Chicago Tribune* (1).

Local resident Rick Brown, for example, told *The Washington Post* in 1992 that he thought Quayle was seriously mistaken if he believed the economy wasn't of the most pressing concern to voters.

"I would say the upper-level politicians, when you get past your congressman, you take the senators and the vice-president and the president -- they don't understand America," he said (French F1). "They just don't know what's going on out here ... You take a family of four -- $20,000 a year just doesn't cut it. and I've got a four-year college degree, and that's the best you can do ... Let Dan Quayle walk a month in my shoes."

With a gender gap marking support around the United States for the ultimately successful 1992 candidate Bill Clinton, *Chicago Tribune* writer Ron Grossman touched on differences of opinion he observed between upper -middle-class husbands and wives on Muncie's north side. As tended to be the case around the country that year, Grossman sensed discomfort about the Republicans' strict anti-abortion plank among some affluent women he encountered locally.

"Each time one of the women tried to make a point, her husband would take over in mid-sentence, reminding me of a passage from the Lynds, who noted that among Muncie's reigning mores in the 1930s was a conviction 'that most women cannot be expected to understand public problems as well as men,'" Grossman wrote (C2). "One wife tried explaining why she was uncomfortable with the Republican position on abortion. Her husband cut her off."

Despite Clinton's victory that year, troubles for Democrats in national politics were soon to follow. East Central Indiana voters' decision in the 1994 congressional election seemed typical of voters'

mindset nationwide. A conservative Republican, David McIntosh, was elected to Indiana's 2nd District congressional seat long held by a Democrat. Nationwide, Republicans made sufficient gains that year to take control of the House of Representatives for the first time in four decades.

As Clinton pursued an increasingly centrist appeal with the 1996 election approaching, *The Economist* suggested Muncie, which was correctly projected to favor Clinton again in that year's presidential vote, might exemplify the Democratic Party's success in finally perfecting a moderate, economic-based appeal to frustrated middle-class voters. More liberal Democratic presidential candidates of the previous two decades hadn't been able to gain strong support in Muncie, espousing ideas that in such a community seemed "too much of a threat to traditional ways (Grossman 2)."

The Economist cited Roper Starch survey data suggesting that while Midwesterners reported fewer job-related difficulties than residents of other U.S. regions, they more often identified fear about being fired or losing pay. "Muncie has shared that confidence, and that insecurity, both at once ('Lawnmower' 29)."

Economic Transitions

In the latter half of the 1990s, economic anxieties may have proven well-founded for many Muncie residents relying on manufacturing industries for income. In 1996, automotive supplier Borg-Warner announced the sale of its manual transmission business to Tremec, which would shift production to Mexico. The sale, which Borg-Warner attributed to financial losses brought about by lower demand for stick-shift cars, meant the loss of about 800 local manufacturing jobs.

In their report on the initial Middletown study, the Lynds noted the predominance of the manufacturing sector in Muncie's economy of the 1920s. "Little connection appears between most of the nearly four hundred routinized activities in which these men and women are engrossed day after day in their specialized places of work and the food, sex and shelter needs of human beings. A few of these workers buy and sell quantities of food, clothing and fuel made by other specialized workers in other communities, and a few others spend their days in making houses for other members of the group. Only to a negligible extent does Middletown make the food it eats and the clothing it wears.. Instead, it makes hundreds of thousands of glass bottles or scores of thousands of insulators or automobile engine parts," Helen and Robert Lynd wrote (39)."

Indeed, as the Ball Corporation, with its glass container manufacturing operations, became closely linked to Muncie's economic identity, so did automotive-related industries. Warner Gear, as a transmission manufacturer, was the first major example of such, established in 1901 (Marsh and Brown 6). Delco Battery and a Chevrolet transmission plant (later known as Hydramatic and eventually New Venture Gear) would come to be known as the other two members of Muncie's own "big three" (Marsh and Brown 6). Numerous non-automotive manufacturing concerns also were influential in Muncie's development through the first seven decades of the 20th century, such as Ontario Corporation (initially a producer of silver-plated flatware and later of jet aircraft forgings) and Indiana Steel and Wire (Marsh and Brown 7).

By the time of Caplow's sociological revisitation of Muncie in the late 1970s, the city's economy had , like that of the United States, begun to follow a trend toward diversification (Peterson 20). Ball Corporation no longer maintained in Muncie the glass-manufacturing operations that had provided one of the dominant sources of employment 50 years earlier (S. Marsh and Brown 18). In a 1975 report on the Muncie economy, researchers at Ball State's Bureau of Business Research reported that while manufacturing remained a dominant economic sector locally, it had borne the largest share of employment declines since the mid-1960s (Brown et al. 1).

Still, the report continued, the Muncie area saw an overall increase in job growth during the same time period, attributable to increases in retail and government service employment. (Brown et al. 1).

The growth of Ball State University provided a major source of such service-sector employment increases locally. In the early 1950s, the school remained a relatively small college still focused heavily on teacher education, with an enrollment just under 3,000 (Ball State University Alumni Association 2). Between 1952 and 1966, enrollment increased to 13,000 and program offerings were diversified to include 21 curricula in five academic colleges. (Ball State University Alumni Association 2).

"Manufacturing jobs have declined in relative importance and number in the Muncie economy, but the growth of Ball State has helped offset the loss of those jobs," concluded Joseph Brown and Keith Marsh in a 1980 report on the university's local economic impact (1). In addition to the 3,400 jobs then directly provided for faculty, staff and students by the university, a multiplier effect caused by expenditures on goods and services by these parties required the employment of 5,012 more people

locally (Brown and Marsh 21). The researchers estimated that for every 1,000 students attending the university at that time, 525 jobs were created locally. "These numbers should not be construed as saying that the local community is dependent on the university; however, they do show that the university is a vital part of the local economy," Brown and Marsh stated (21).

The growth of the university in the 1960s and '70s may have influenced in part some of the local growth in another sector--wholesale and retail trade. From 1964 to 1974, this segment of the economy saw employment increase by 68 percent (Brown et al. 20).

For the U.S. as a whole, an increasing role for service industries as a source of job growth had been occurring in the half-century since the first Middletown study as well. The number of employees on payrolls in goods-producing industries rose from 12.5 million to 22.5 million between 1925 and 1975 (Bureau of Labor Statistics), an increase of 80 percent. More dramatic was the increase in the number of service-industry employees, from 16.3 million in 1925 to 54.4 million in 1975 (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

In his 1991 book, *America and the New Economy,* Anthony Patrick Carnevale offered several explanations for the continuing shift in the U.S. economy toward service work. In periods of rising incomes, material wants are satisfied with a smaller percentage of one's financial resources, leaving one freer to obtain education, recreation, health care and other services (130). Also, since greater productivity has been accomplished in manufacturing industries using fewer and fewer workers and enhanced technology, a stronger role is created for service-performing technicians in relation to production workers (Carnevale 131). Competitive pressures

in a more complex global economic environment also dictate more of a need for managers, research and development professionals, sales and marketing personnel to strategically design, create and distribute state-of-the-art goods in a timely way (Carnevale 131).

Between the mid-1970s and mid-1990s, about 6,000 manufacturing jobs were lost in Delaware County. The workforce at Borg-Warner for example, fluctuated in number during these two decades, but by the early 1990s totaled 2,200, down from 3,200 two decades earlier. What is now New Venture Gear saw its employment reduced by half during the same period, from 2,400 in 1973 (Marsh and Brown 6) to about 1,200. Smaller manufacturing operations such as Broderick Co. and Pyromet closed (Francisco 8).

The latter half of the 20th century saw increasing challenges to American manufacturing competitiveness from abroad, as European and Asian economies recovered in the post-World War II era. At a 1993 Joint Economic Committee Hearing of the U.S. Congress focusing on manufacturing job losses and the prospects for such employment in the future, Julie Gorte, a senior associate at the U.S. Government's Office of Technology Assessment, presented a statement identifying the nature of the new economic challenges: "By the late 1970s, it was plain that some of the imports were competing not just on the basis of lower prices (often attributed, at the time at least, mostly to lower labor costs) but that competition based on predictably higher quality and better technology had also begun. By the early 1980s, for example, automobiles, consumer electronics and steel were being produced more efficiently and with better quality in Japan and a few other Asian nations and to some extent in Europe than in the United States (U.S. "Manufacturing 51)."

Numerous Muncie-area manufacturers have cited a need to reevaluate operations to attain the higher level of efficiency necessary to survive in a more competitive economic climate. Local Borg-Warner management, for example, cited the need in 1996 to sell the manual transmission line that had been losing money and to insist on higher quality in order to maintain long-term stability for the plant's operation overall (Francisco 9). Delphi said the 1998 closure of its Muncie battery plant was part of an effort to increase efficiency by consolidating production at other plants (Koenig 1). New Venture Gear, another drive train component producer, began losing money in 1983 and continued bleeding red ink for nearly 15 years. Then, the plant's management and unionized workers agreed to reorganize production activities into "cells," which give workers greater responsibility and flexibility, with an intent to improve quality and efficiency and lessen the threat of a plant closure (Koenig 1).

The economic recession faced by the United States in the early 1980s "rocked East Central Indiana harder than anywhere (Francisco 8)." Unemployment figures reached 15 percent in Delaware County and 5,000 jobs were lost locally during the downturn (Huggler 47). In the later 1980s, the manufacturing job situation stabilized, with slight recoveries in manufacturing employment attributable to growth in small and medium-sized firms (Huggler 47). Still, such additions and expansions didn't completely fill the void of the downsizing in the '70s and early '80s (Francisco 9). Service industries continued to be a source of job growth. One major employer whose growth seemed to indicate Muncie's increasing role as a regional service center was Ball Memorial Hospital, which in the 1980s expanded its community services and added a $20

million outpatient facility (Huggler 47). Ball State University saw additional enrollment growth in the 1970s and '80s and continued to be a relatively stable major employer (Huggler 47).

A comparison of U.S. Census data for 1970 and 1990 shows similar trends toward employment growth in service-oriented economic sectors and a lesser role for the manufacturing sector as a source of jobs for the seven-county East Central Indiana region of which Muncie is a part and for the United States as a whole:

Table 2: Comparison of Employment in Job Market Categories for East Central Indiana and U.S. as a Whole, 1970-1990

Employment Category	*Location*	*% of workforce, 1970*	*% of workforce, 1990*
Agriculture	E.C. Indiana	3.0	2.5
	United States	4.4	2.7
Construction/ Mining	E.C. Indiana	4.0	4.6
	United States	6.9	7.1
Manufacturing	E.C. Indiana	44.0	28.7
	United States	26.4	18.4
Transportation	E.C. Indiana	4.1	5.1
	United States	6.8	6.9
Wholesale Trade	E.C. Indiana	2.4	3.3
	United States	6.8	6.9
Retail Trade	E.C. Indiana	15.1	18.6
	United States	15.7	16.3
Finance	E.C. Indiana	3.0	4.1
	United States	5.0	6.8
Services*	E.C. Indiana	21.7	30.4
	United States	25.9	33.1
Public Administration	E.C. Indiana	2.7	2.7
	United States	5.7	4.7

*Occupations included in this category are education, health care, legal and other professional services along with nonprofessional service jobs

Source: K. Arter, "How the Job Market Has Changed." The (Muncie) Star Press, 23 March 1997, Jobs Section, p. 9.

When the most recent series of manufacturing downsizing was announced, some of Muncie's economic development observers predicted many displaced workers could be absorbed into job openings created by service-sector growth and the smaller manufacturing companies which had arrived during the previous decade. Still, concerns existed that laid-off workers would not be able to find jobs providing their former level of income (Koenig 1).

Stefan Anderson, chairman of Muncie's First Merchants Corporation, said along with higher education and health care, light manufacturing would be a likely ingredient for economic vitality as the community entered the new millennium (Penticuff 3). But economic development observers from around Indiana noted that education improvements might be necessary to fulfill the technology-reliant niche the state and nation would have to follow to compete in a global economy.

"The effective use of technology is going to be imperative in all components of the value chain, from product design all the way to delivery," Ball State technology management professor John Goodale said (Francisco 9). "Just being able to use a machine is different than understanding a machine. Our advantage is our ability to educate our workers. We have the resources."

Conclusions

The Lynds' caution in the 1925 *Middletown* study against labeling Muncie a "typical" American community probably is still appropriate. To use such a city, with its population still largely of old European stock, as an all-encompassing representation of American culture would probably not be effective in a time when the U.S. population as a whole is tending toward considerably greater ethnic diversity. Still, Muncie's political and social moderation would seem to convey a general set of life experiences which a great many Americans could easily comprehend. Here may lie Muncie's continuing usefulness to journalists and academics as a window to examine political and social trends. For the media in particular, obtaining Muncie residents' perspectives on current issues and trends might add a human element that would help audience members put polling numbers and other research findings in perspective.

The manufacturing-oriented economy that the Lynds observed having transformed "Middletown's" culture in a variety of ways appears to be diversifying to include a greater role for other sectors in providing a living for Muncie residents. Similar trends seem to have been underway for the U.S. economy as a whole as it takes on new roles in an increasingly globalized economy. Here, Muncie may provide an interesting case study in which to examine how residents cope with the occasional economic dislocations created by such transitions, and address the challenges of acquiring the skills and education necessary to maintain or expand a standard of living in an economy where technology plays an ever-important role.

In a time when national political campaigns are paying increasing attention to winning over voters at what President Bill Clinton termed in

1996 the "vital center" of the ideological spectrum, "Middletown," with its penchant for "swing" voting may provide for journalists a venue in which to glimpse the concerns behind public opinion. With the front-runners for both the Democratic and Republican presidential nominations in 2000 having seen success in appealing to middle-class voters' uncertainties about economic and cultural change, Muncie, in which journalists and sociologists have observed many residents' decline over the years in optimism for the future, might well offer the media insights into the candidates' prospects nationwide.

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